

STH TT 923, GRS PH 630, GRS PH 684: Philosophical Cosmology

Syllabus

Fall, 2012
Tuesday 2-5
STH 440

Robert Neville, Instructor
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Hours: Tue. 8:30-9:30,
Wed. 10-11
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The purpose of this course is to introduce students to major positions in philosophical cosmology relative to the twin questions of the nature of God and scientific knowledge of the natural world. Connected with both of these is the question of where value lies in the world, if anywhere, given the assumptions of a fact-value distinction in modern science. The main interest will be with discussions in the West, although some cross-cultural comparative points will be made. The underlying thesis of the course is that the rise of early modern science radically shifted the cosmological assumptions (Platonic and Aristotelian) that had been in the background of medieval Jewish and Christian (philosophical) theology. Where Protestant thinkers mainly retreated from philosophical theology to biblical language, ignoring science, and Roman Catholic thinkers tended to fixate on medieval cosmology and philosophy, the modern Western philosophical thinkers responded to the challenge with great creativity. Not only did they re-conceive philosophical cosmology in light of science, but they reconceived the nature of God. Outstanding examples are Descartes, Spinoza, and Leibniz. Kant, in his first Critique, claimed that only empirical science can know nature, and thus eliminated the possibility of philosophical cosmology along with metaphysics and philosophical theology. Subsequent retrievals of philosophical cosmology need to get around the Kantian project and its outworkings, particularly representationalist theories of knowledge, and the separation of fact from value.

This course will quickly review the philosophical cosmologies of Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, and Kant. Then it will investigate at some greater leisure the philosophical cosmologies of Charles Peirce, Alfred North Whitehead, and the instructor.

Learning Goals: This course is designed primarily for doctoral students in the Science, Philosophy, and Religion program who have matriculated with master's level work in some science and religion but little background in western philosophy. Therefore it is a doctoral level intensive introduction to modern western philosophy plus a survey of recent philosophical cosmologies. It is also appropriate for graduate students in religion and philosophy and for advanced undergraduates willing to work at a doctoral level pace. Goal 1: To bring students quickly into the conversation about nature and God in modern western philosophy.

Goal 2: To enable students to be articulate about the standard moves in problems concerning nature and God.

Goal 3: To enable students to develop their own philosophical positions against a range of alternatives on issues of philosophical cosmology.

Goal 4: To improve students' ability to write research papers with imagination at the doctoral level.

Books. The following books should be purchased. In the cases of the classic modern philosophers, students are invited to acquire standard editions of their works rather than the anthology listed here, although the anthology is adequate for the assignments of this course. The books are (more or less) available at the BU Bookstore (Barnes and Noble).

1. Cahn, Steve M., editor. *Classics of Western Philosophy*, Hackett
2. Neville, Robert Cummings. *Reconstruction of Thinking* SUNY
3. Neville, Robert Cummings. *Recovery of the Measure* SUNY
4. Peirce, Charles S. *The Essential Peirce*, volume 1 and volume 2, edited by the Peirce Edition Project, Indiana U.P.
5. Whitehead, Alfred North. *Process and Reality*. Corrected edition by David Ray Griffin and Donald Sherburne. Free Press
6. Whitehead, Alfred North. *Science and the Modern World*. Macmillan

Structure and Grades. The class will be conducted as a seminar with a student making a 15 minute presentation on the assigned reading each week, with comments from each of the other students.

Grades for the class will be based on seminar presentations, class discussion, and a term paper of approximately 5,000 words. The term papers should be about the possibility of philosophical cosmology, the truth or falsity in some important respect of one of the cosmologies read, or a new cosmological philosophy. All should deal in relevant ways with the relation of what science delivers to philosophical theology. Students should have a topic and outline approved by the instructor before November 15. Students are encouraged to speed-read all the books in the first two weeks so as to have some idea of the positions to be discussed toward the end of the course that might be of interest for the term paper. **Term papers are due at the last class. Incompletes will not be given except in cases of emergency as approved by the School of Theology registrar.**

Students with Disabilities—Any students in this course who have a disability that might prevent them from fully demonstrating their abilities should meet with the instructor as soon as possible to initiate disability verification and discuss accommodations that may be necessary to ensure your full participation in the successful completion of course requirements.

The STH Academic Code of Conduct may be found on the STH website at: www.bu.edu/sth/academic/academic-conduct. All students are required to familiarize themselves with this code, its definitions of misconduct, and its sanctions. Students should especially familiarize themselves with the section on plagiarism.

Do not plagiarize! See the instructor if in doubt about what this means.

Class assignments. Please prepare the assigned readings according to the following schedule.

9/4 Introduction.

9/11 Neville, *Reconstruction of Thinking*, chapters 1-4.

- 9/18 Descartes (from Cahn), *Meditations*. Spinoza (from Cahn), *Ethics*, parts 1 and 2.
- 9/25 Leibniz (from Cahn), *Monadology*. Kant (from Cahn), *Critique of Pure Reason*, through the Transcendental Aesthetic.
- 10/2 Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, to the end of the Transcendental Logic.
- 10/9 Monday class schedule, no class.
- 10/16 Peirce, volume 1, chapters 2, 3, 7, 8, 25; volume 2, chapters 24-25.
- 10/23 Peirce, from *The Essential Peirce*, volume 2, chapters 29, 2, 13, 14.
- 10/30 Whitehead, *Science and the Modern World*, entire.
- 11/6 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Part 1 entire, Part 3, entire.
- 11/13 Whitehead, *Process and Reality*, Part 2, entire; Part 5, entire.
- 11/20 No Class: AAR.
- 11.27 Neville, *Reconstruction of Thinking*, Part 2, entire.
- 12/4 Neville, *Recovery of the Measure*, Part 1, entire; Part 2, entire.
- 12/11 Neville, *Recovery of the Measure*, Part 3, entire; Part 4, entire. **Term papers due at the beginning of class: no extensions**